

WESTERN COVENTRY FIRE DISTRICT
1110 Victory Highway, Greene, Rhode Island 02827
Phone (401) 397-7520, Fax (401) 397-1084, www.wcfd.net
Board of Directors Meeting
Monday, 28 October, 2013, 7:00 P.M.
MINUTES
(Posted 23 October, 2013)

Members Present

John Humble, Chairman

Richard Holt

Robert Hevey

Robert Guastini

Chief Quattrini

Glenn Underwood

WCS Mays III

Attorney Harsch

Captain Mann

Steven Bousquet

Cheryl Wilcox, Clerk

Jonathan Farnum is excused

- 1. Call to Order and Attendance** – The Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
- 2. Confirmation of required meeting posting and quorum** – Mr. Humble confirmed that there was a quorum present and the meeting was posted in all the required locations.
- 3. CCFD receivership status and any possible WCFD response/action items** – the call of this meeting was prompted by a request from Chief Baynes that this BOD submit a letter to the Judge indicating what CCFD liquidation would mean to WCFD. He also made the same request to Hopkins Hill and Anthony Districts. The Chief of Anthony does intend on responding. Our Chief is unsure if Hopkins Hill will be responding. The Judge is willing to receive motions until tomorrow in preparation for the hearing on November 1, 2013. A couple of key points that Mr. Humble would make if we are going to respond to Chief Baynes request, was that this BOD has to be involved in any decision that impacts Western Coventry. It is our hope the CCFD can find its way out of this difficult situation and remain intact. Mr. Humble asks if the BOD wants to participate in this hearing process and if so, to what extent and what do we want to convey. Mr. Humble is frustrated that there is nothing that comes formally from the court requesting that we participate in this process. Attorney Harsch says that if you participate in the hearing process you may find yourself some discovery. As a participant you have no idea what you are opening the district up to. Attorney Harsch suggests that we take the request and turn it into a draft to go to the Judge to say that the BOD runs the show of WCFD, Attorney Harsch represents the district, and it is a fully independent volunteer operation chartered by the General Assembly. Mr. Harsch distributes the draft letter he proposes be presented to the Judge. After reading the draft, Mr.

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Mays suggests taking out the word professional on the second page and Mr. Guastini asks that the word volunteers be removed. Mr. Humble says that the letter makes the point that this BOD is in control of this district and Mr. Harsch is representing this district. Mr. Humble wonders if the Judge is looking for some input as to whether or not liquidation is a good idea for the common good of the district. Attorney Harsh states that he thought one of the points that Mr. Humble wanted to make that this BOD's desire was that CCFD would remain intact. He thinks that with the Guthrie bill, the odds are that it is going to. He also says that the unions are challenging the budget.

Mr. Hevey says if the CCFD puts some other rescue and fire protection in place that is adequate to the district; it provides no impact to this district. We don't know what they have up their sleeve, so for us to react now when we don't know what they are doing...they have enough money to run for roughly nine months. Even if they run at their present state for nine months, they can be working on whatever transition plan they have. During that time we can comment on their transition plan. Until we know where they're going, I don't know if it's prudent for us to comment on anything.

Mr. Harsch says that if this district gets sucked into a town wide organization, they will be tapping your tax base and equipment. He says that they will ask the General Assembly to repeal the district charters.

Mr. Mays asks how the town could take over the district without taxpayer approval. Attorney Harsch says that as long as the charter stands, it can't. Mr. Hevey asks if that is what happened in Cumberland. Attorney Harsch believes that was voluntary. Mr. Hevey says that some of the districts voted against it but it was a town wide referendum. He says that they effectively repealed the four charters and merged them into one, even though the one district didn't want to be in it.

Mr. Guastini asks what would prevent this district from joining another district like West Greenwich; why do we have to be in the Coventry district. Attorney Harsch doesn't know of any district in the state that has crossed town lines. Mr. Hevey says that if two districts went to the General Assembly and requested merging as a preemptive measure, would it not fly now that it is a multi-town referendum.

Captain Mann asks what the reason would be to dissolve a charter of a district that is in good shape like ours. Attorney Harsch says certainly on merit, no. The problem is that you are going to get some serious politics here.

Chief Quattrini explains that if CCFD privatizes rescue services it will cost us every time they have to give mutual aid to our district.

Mr. Humble asks if Coventry liquidates, are we just going to walk away. Other members think that we don't know enough now. Mr. Humble says that it is fair to say that we would encourage CCFD to resolve their problems and encourage the Judge to encourage CCFD to stay intact. Anything other than that will cause more worries. Mr. Hevey says that one of the things on the

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table was that Anthony and Hopkins Hill would split CCFD if the liquidated. He says that under the consolidation, those two departments may be better than the three that were there. It may be a positive. Mr. Humble states that anything that impacts this district, we want to be at the table. Mr. Hevey says that may be all that we want to say right now because we don't know where it is going. He suggests we add to the letter that we want to remain an independent district.

Attorney Harsch suggests that the one concern that he has is once you raise this districts profile in this proceeding, the people who aren't thinking about you will begin thinking about you. In a sense, because your tax rate is so low and your assessed values are pretty good, you may be looking like a good way to even things out for districts that have problems. When asked what he would do if he were the Judge, Attorney Harsch says that what he thinks the Judge is doing is to keep putting pressure on. He would be very surprised if the Judge actually came to a decision on November 1st.

Mr. Hevey asks Attorney Harsch what his thoughts are in stating that we want to remain an independent district. He says that it is a little self serving, but you could easily put it the other way and say knowing the district as well as we do, we think our particular way of dealing with the situation as evidenced by the tax rate and the number of on call staff is best for the western part of the town. Mr. Underwood says that it isn't that time yet. He says their taxpayers just made a decision and we have no right to second guess what their taxpayers decided what was right for their district. But, we want to be at that table if redistricting is discussed.

Mr. Guastini says that we have to make it clear that we have a good chain of command here and we know what we're doing because we're going to owe it to the taxpayer.

A motion is made by Mr. Hevey and seconded by Mr. Guastini to approve the letter as amended from William Harsch representing WCFD to Judge Stern. Mr. Hevey says that the only amendments were deleting volunteer, deleting professional, and the low tax rate. The order of the bullet points shall also be rearranged (2 to 1, 3 to 2, and 1 to 3) Mr. Harsch suggests another amendment saying that we think it would be great that CCFD amends their problems. Mr. Hevey thinks that is butting into the CCFD taxpayers business. All voted aye. Motion carried.

Attorney Harsch and Mr. Humble will appear at the hearing on November 1st.

Mr. Hevey suggests everyone go home and start brainstorming what we would do if there is a beginning of a drive to try to create a town wide fire department and come back when we reconvene. Mr. Humble will put it on the agenda.

4. Open Forum

5. Schedule next BOD meeting – the next meeting will be held on November 4th.

6. Adjournment – a motion is made by Mr. Guastini and seconded by Mr. Hevey to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 p.m. All voted aye. Motion carried.